

Message Text

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73

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 PM-07 NSC-10 SS-15 RSC-01 CIAE-00

INR-10 NSAE-00 DODE-00 L-03 MC-02 EB-11 AID-20 IGA-02

RSR-01 /103 W

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R 081710Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3469

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 3013

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, ES

SUBJ: GOES POSITION ON A-37 PURCHASE

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 2850, B. DAO IR NO. 68290024 73

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

1. COUNTRY TEAM HAS ATTEMPTED TO DETERMINE THE REASONS WHY THE GOES DEFERRED DECISION (PERHAPS INDEFINITELY) ON THE US A-37 OFFER. OUR ESTIMATE IS AT BEST A TENTATIVE ONE SINCE GOES OFFICIALS (AND MOD COL. ROMERO IN PARTICULAR) ARE RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS THE MATTER OPENLY AND FRANKLY.

2. FIRST, IT MUST BE BORNE IN MIND THAT WITHIN THE SALVADORAN AIR FORCE (FAS), THERE HAS NEVER BEEN TOTAL AGREEMENT ON THE KIND OF AIRCRAFT NEEDED TO REPLACE THEIR AGING TACTICAL FIGHTERS. TO SOME, THE A-37 WAS A SATISFACTORY REPLACEMENT BUT TO OTHERS IT WAS NOT FOR VARIOUS REASONS: THE AIRCRAFT LACKED AN AIR-TO-AIR TACTICAL CAPABILITY, THE LAG IN DELIVER TIME WAS TOO LONG AND/OR THE SUBSONIC PLANE WAS JUST NOT "HOT" ENOUGH. IN ADDITION,
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SOME ARGUED THAT THE FAS NEEDED TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT AS

BADLY AS TACTICAL AIRCRAFT AND IF A FAIRLY EXPENSIVE DEAL FOR THE LATTER WERE SIGNED, THERE WOULD BE LITTLE CHANCE OF GETTING THE FORMER AS WELL.

3. SECONDLY, AS INDICATED REF B, THE MOD (A CAVALRY OFFICER), HAS LITTLE PERSONAL ENTHUSIASM FOR AIRCRAFT MODERNIZATION, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT INVOLVES RELATIVELY LARGE SUMS OF MONEY. HIS MAIN CONCERN HAS APPARENTLY BEEN AN INSTITUTIONAL ONE--HOW TO SATISFY THE DEMANDS OF THE FAS TO WHOM THE GOVT OWES SOMETHING OF A DEBT OF GRATITUDE FOLLOWING ITS KEY ROLE IN PUTTING DOWN THE 1972 COUP ATTEMPT. THUS, HE LEFT TO THE FAS THE TECHNICAL DECISION OF WHAT AIRCRAFT WAS SUITABLE FOR ITS NEEDS. BUT WHEN THE TIME CAME TO BITE THE BULLET, WHEN THE CONTRACT WAS BEFORE HIM FOR SIGNATURE AND WITH NO ASSURANCE OF FMS CREDIT TO EASE THE FINANCIAL PAIN OF A \$6 MILLION COMMITMENT, IT WAS PERHAPS EASIER TO FALL BACK UPON THE CONTINUING DISCUSSION WITHIN THE FAS OVER THE SUITABILITY OF THE AIRCRAFT ITSELF AND CALL FOR ANOTHER LOOK AROUND THE MARKET PLACE IN HOPES OF FINDING SOMETHING FASTER, CHEAPER, AND MORE READILY AVAILABLE. BY SO DOING, THE MOD 1) AVOIDED A COSTLY, LONG TERM COMMITMENT (AT LEAST FOR THE AMOUNT) AND 2) SHIFTED THE ISSUE TO THE FAS.

4. AS TO ACQUISITION FROM OTHER SOURCES, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE FAS HAS ANY REALLY SOLID OFFERS OR THAT ANY COMMITMENT TO PURCHASE HAS BEEN MADE BY THE COES. PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION ABOUT SOMETHING LIKE THE FOUGA MAGISTER JET TRAINER MIGHT HAVE OCCURRED DURING THE MOD'S RECENT VISIT TO ISRAEL (TEL AVIV 5990) AND THERE ARE FRAGMENTARY INDICATIONS THAT ITALIAN OR BRITISH SUPPLIERS ARE AGAIN BEING CHECKED. STILL, THE FAS WILL HAVE TO COME UP WITH A VERY ATTRACTIVE OFFER UPON WHICH ITS OFFICERS CAN AGREE BEFORE IT CAN HOPE TO MAKE THE MOD COMMIT HIMSELF.

5. AFTER A NEW ROUND OF SOUL-SEARCHING, AND A POKING ABOUT FOR ALTERNATE SUPPLIERS, THE GOES MAY WELL COME BACK TO A-37'S AGAIN, ESPECIALLY IF FMS CREDIT DOES BECOME AVAILABLE. FOR, AS MUCH AS THE MOD WOULD LIKE IT TO, THE
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UNDERLYING PROBLEM, THE LACK OF A TACTICAL AIR FORCE, WILL SIMPLY NOT GO AWAY.
MOSKOWITZ

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